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S E C R E T LIMA 000196

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/31/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [PE](#)
SUBJECT: "SHINING PATH": WHAT DOES IT MEAN TODAY?

REF: A. LIMA 2560
[1](#)B. LIMA 3707
[1](#)C. LIMA 3764

Classified By: CDA James D. Nealon. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The terrorist organization "Shining Path" (Sendero Luminoso or SL) is currently comprised of two distinct groups, according to analysts. One consists largely of long-time SL members and "true believers" in the Maoist ideology who are reportedly working within civic organizations and universities to revitalize the movement. While this group finds fertile ground in Peru's still pervasive poverty, there are intrinsic obstacles to its joining forces with other actors in Peru's anti-systemic opposition. The second group, itself comprised of two smaller factions, has increasingly involved itself in the drug trade to the exclusion of any political agenda, an evolution akin to that of the FARC in Colombia. While each group separately poses a threat, observers believe that the threat would expand significantly if the two groups reunited. The Government of Peru has a multi-faceted security and civic action plan to end the SL terrorist threat definitively. While there have been some security successes, the plan so far has delivered few tangible civic benefits. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The status of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path -- SL), the Maoist-inspired terrorist group that threatened the viability of the Peruvian state in the late 80s, continues to concern many Peruvians, particularly those with responsibilities for internal defense and security. The capture of SL founder and leader Abimael Guzman in 1992 ended the urgency of the threat but did not definitively eliminate SL from Peru's political landscape. Not long after Guzman's capture, the organization split into two factions. One favored Guzman's attempts to reach a negotiated political settlement with the government ("Acuerdistas"). The other vowed to continue SL's political and military struggle ("Proseguir"). The core of those seeking a negotiated settlement happened to be imprisoned with Guzman and remain focused on securing his release, while those still on the outside, free from the autocratic leader's immediate influence, began circling in more autonomous political orbits.

Acuerdistas

13. (S) The current ranks of "Acuerdistas" have been fed largely by prison releases. Hundreds of Sendero's former core members, after completing their sentences, were freed between 2001 and 2007. According to sensitive sources, Guzman, from his prison cell, retains a significant measure of control and influence over this "Acuerdista" coterie, whose principal objective is to negotiate and secure Guzman's eventual release. (Guzman has been sentenced to life in prison without any possibility of parole or release. He received an additional life sentence January 2 for his role in the massacre of 69 persons in Ayacucho region in 1980, in addition to 26 assassinations and 14 car bombings in 1980 and 1981.) While observers acknowledge that most former Senderistas released from prison have sought to integrate themselves as ordinary citizens into Peruvian society, they also estimate that several hundred retain their ideological commitments and that 50 or more have the political and organizational experience to fill leadership roles in the movement.

14. (C) According to some analysts, these leaders are now using their positions in civic organizations and union groups to foment social unrest. One contact told poloffs of a recent community event in Ayacucho during which he sat across the table from known former Senderistas who now work for the teachers' union SUTEP and are involved in regional politics. Other "Acuerdista" SL members reportedly have resumed their posts as high school and university instructors, where analysts believe they are working below the radar to proselytize new members of student groups supporting Marxist-Leninist-Maoist philosophies (ref A). As an example, some sources refer to the University of San Marcos in Lima -- the oldest and among the largest public universities in Peru -- as a "factory of radicalism" that produces large numbers of semi-educated graduates, typically in "social science," with few prospects for gainful employment. This pattern is reportedly replicated to varying degrees in other public universities around the country. Recent media reports have highlighted more broadly the return of Sendero elements to places of vulnerability such as rural schools in poor regions, but many of these reports lack specificity, and government officials, including the Minister of Education, have taken issue with them.

15. (C) Even in the absence of hard evidence, the revitalization of SL is seen by many observers as at least theoretically plausible because the underlying social conditions that facilitated its initial rise remain mostly unchanged. Notwithstanding Peru's much-touted macroeconomic advances of recent years, poverty, marginalization, unemployment and lack of opportunity in general, particularly but not only in Peru's Sierra region such as Ayacucho (the birthplace of SL), remain stubbornly persistent. According to some analysts, as long as this remains so the country will continue to provide fertile terrain for radical groups. At the same time, however, SL rarely collaborated with mere fellow travelers in radicalism, and often fought bitter and even deadly battles with ideological and political rivals on the left. Many anti-systemic opposition groups, including, for example, Ollanta Humala's Nationalist Party, are sworn enemies of Sendero for this reason. In a 2007 meeting, Humala told us he opposed violence as a political instrument because had seen the devastation wrought upon Peru by Sendero Luminoso. SL's use of savage and indiscriminate violence, sometimes against whole communities, elicited widespread popular revulsion, a sentiment that remains prevalent today. For this reason, any association with SL can be a kiss of death for groups seeking to forge a political future in Peru's sizable and diverse anti-systemic camp, which often causes them to steer clear.

Proseguir

16. (C) Following Guzman's 1992 capture, the Sendero organization crumbled and authorities swept the countryside in search of its remnants. Those Sendero members who became

members of the "Proseguir" group sought refuge separately in two remote areas of the country. One faction -- led by "Comrade Artemio" -- hid in the Upper Huallaga River Valley, primarily in the Huanuco region, the other -- led by "Comrade Alipio" -- in the VRAE (Apurimac and Ene River Valley) in the northern Ayacucho region. Security officials soon gave up the difficult search, thinking (or hoping) the remnant groups would fade away. During the last 15 years, both groups have clung to survival on the jungle margins, adapting themselves to a political condition characterized by the absence of outside leadership or guidance. Concretely, this means that each group retained a Maoist veneer and the explicit commitment to continuing the armed struggle while, in practical terms, gradually deepening and expanding their involvement in the drug trade.

¶17. (C) In both cases, SL's involvement in the trade began by charging traffickers "protection money" to ensure the safety of their enterprises and cargo. Over time, it expanded across the narcotics chain, and has come to include growing coca, processing coca leaf into cocaine paste and recently -- particularly in the VRAE -- producing refined cocaine hydrochloride. Analysts believe that Alipio's organization, for example, has hundreds of "micro-labs" scattered throughout the VRAE area. Some observers have remarked on the similarity of this pattern to Colombia's experience with the FARC (ref C).

¶18. (S) The VRAE's inaccessibility and virtual absence of any state presence, including security forces, makes it a quasi-ungoverned area dominated by narcotics traffickers. According to many analysts, this is one reason why the VRAE faction of Proseguir appears to be flourishing. (Note: It is also the reason there are no eradication or alternative development programs in the VRAE. End Note.) While core SL membership there is probably fewer than 100, according to sensitive reports, part-time or contract membership relating to carrying out specific tasks and responsibilities in the narcotics trade may be twice that number. By contrast, observers see Artemio's group in the Upper Huallaga as being on the defensive for the past two years. At the height of its strength, the Upper Huallaga SL group reportedly numbered approximately 150 militants. Operational successes by government security forces caused the group significant losses in 2007, and authorities claim that Artemio's arrest may be imminent (ref B). If that happens, many analysts predict the remaining SL structure in the Upper Huallaga could collapse.

Efforts to Reunite

¶19. (C) While each of the above groups separately represent varying degrees of immediate and potential threat now (even if nothing like the critical threat to the viability and survival of the Peruvian state that SL did in the late 1980s), observers focused on a worst-case outlook are concerned about their possibly reuniting. This concern is fueled in part by reports that such a move is afoot. For example, some analysts claim evidence that Guzman's long-time companion and now-wife, Elena Iparraguirre (AKA "Comrade Miriam", also imprisoned), is leading efforts to mend the rift in the Sendero organization. There were reports in October 2007 that the head of Sendero's Lima Metropolitan Committee, Emilio Robero Mera, had recently traveled to the VRAE to consult with that area's leadership. Perhaps more impactful than anecdotal reports, however, is a larger speculative concern that the combination of Proseguir's narco-dollars and paramilitary capabilities with the Acuerdistas' ideological fervor and political machine could produce a terrorism challenge reminiscent of the 1980s. (Comment: A reuniting of the two groups or significant reblossoming of the pre-Fujimori SL seems to us unlikely for a number of reasons, among them passage of time, irreconcilable differences and a transformed national and international context. End Comment.)

Comment: GOP Priority to End Terrorism Definitively

¶10. (C) President Garcia has two priority goals for his second term in office, both relating to resurrecting his reputation from his disastrous first term (85-90). The first goal is to ensure economic stability and growth. The second is to end definitively Peru's terrorist threat -- a threat widely perceived as having exploded out of control on his first watch. The GOP has laid out a comprehensive plan -- with economic development, social and civil, intelligence, and security components -- to do this. It has a subordinate plan to take on the challenges particular to the VRAE, with similar component elements. But that plan has only been partially implemented, both in geographic and functional terms. Expanding the presence of the state to emergency zones such as the VRAE and pushing out the benefits of economic growth to impoverished regions such as Ayacucho -- difficult challenges in the best of cases -- have not yet meaningfully happened. In that sense, apart from punctuated operational successes in the Upper Huallaga region, the GOP's plan to eliminate SL from Peru's landscape once and for all has yielded few results so far.

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